

## CAN POSTMODERN WAR BE MORAL? QUESTIONING DISCRIMINATION AND PROPORTION IN KOSOVO

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The precision and effectiveness of modern weaponry is seductive. The recent war in Kosovo, during which news media thought it worthy to tell us which weapons were made by whom and how they worked, exhibited just how seductive technology can be. Nightly newscasts devoted significant time to videotapes of air-launched missiles and bombs striking their designated targets with impressive exactness and comprehensive destructiveness. Newspapers printed computer-generated images of the latest weapons and their vital statistics: how far they could fly, how much power they pack, how much they cost. Even the moralist who might otherwise be clearheaded about such things could find his or her critical sense clouded by the sweet science of modern warfare. He or she might even conclude that technology has made war more just. The relatively low numbers of innocent deaths might be considered a victory for a more humane prosecution of war. The specter of modern war, which earlier this century terrified ethicists (and many others!), might seem to have vanished and been replaced by a relatively benign post-modern version.<sup>1</sup> Even for those who became “nuclear pacifists,” technology may indeed have made war moral again.

But much of this is a seduction. Technology has drawn attention away from pertinent moral issues to the dazzling beauty of smart bombs and stealth fighters. Thus, ethicists more than ever need to turn their attention to the means of war waging, as beneath the aesthetic impressiveness of videotaped weaponry and casualty-free warfare lurks an ugly underneath. The obsession with weapons technology is hiding something fundamentally problematic about the modern theory and practice of war. Just as new technologies open new possibilities for a juster prosecution of war, they raise new questions about the way wars will be fought in the future.

This essay seeks, then, to reintroduce and reinforce an old issue in the analysis of war, namely, the protection of innocent civilians from all attack, whether direct or indirect. Because new technology discriminates